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## **The S.A.G.E. Project:**

### **A Model for Library Support of Distance Education**

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**ABSTRACT.** This paper describes the process and creation of a library resources and services Web page within WebCT, a course authoring program that is being used to deliver complete course content over the Internet in a distance education program at The Ohio State University. A librarian at the Prior Health Sciences Library was asked to join a faculty team to teach and provide library services for a series of three courses. The students are working health professionals who cannot attend regularly scheduled classes. Illustrations are included of the WebCT course page and the library resources and services page. The initial process and planning are described, and recommendations for future research are identified.

### ***INTRODUCTION***

In January 2001, the Office of Geriatrics and Gerontology (OGG) at The Ohio State University (OSU) contacted the Prior Health Sciences Library (PHSL) to plan library support for students enrolled in a distance education program. The Series in Applied Gerontology Education (S.A.G.E.) would be the first offering of this type that would involve the PHSL. The overall project consisted of three courses offered from March through November 2001. The students were full-time working professionals who were not able to attend regularly scheduled classes on campus.

The Health Sciences Center uses the software program WebCT to support faculty efforts in organizing courses on the World Wide Web (Web). Through WebCT, students have access to readings, calendars, syllabi, discussion groups/chat, e-mail, and Internet resources twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

An instructional design specialist met to train and plan the creation of Internet accessible materials that followed stated course objectives of the three S.A.G.E. instructors. A librarian also worked with the WebCT design specialist and created a library Web page to be accessed through WebCT. The Web page was designed to provide online access to library resources and services as part of the course. This paper describes how the PHSL supported the information needs of this distance education project.

## ***PROJECT OVERVIEW***

The OGG solicited applications and accepted twenty students into the S.A.G.E. program. Of these students, sixteen lived in the central Ohio area, two lived near Cincinnati, two in the Cleveland area, and one in Pennsylvania. All students paid tuition directly to the Office of Geriatrics and Gerontology. Because the students were non-traditional, or outside the normal registration process of the University, arrangements for an OSU e-mail account and library patron record were managed separately for each student.

The administrative program coordinator for the OGG took on the role of managing the needs and efforts of all participating faculty. The faculty team consisted of a WebCT instructor, one instructor for each course, and a librarian. Before the first class, a day-long orientation was planned (see Appendix). All participants attended the session except the student from Pennsylvania, who received a packet of orientation materials and additional instruction via e-mail. The orientation had four main goals: (1) to introduce the students to their professors (the only time they would meet), (2) to introduce the students to each other to facilitate group work for student chat and discussion, (3) to review basic computer skills needed to use WebCT, and (4) to receive library services and resources instruction.

The librarian's role on the team consisted of three main initiatives: (1) to inform the team instructors of virtual library resources and services; (2) to create a library services and resources page within WebCT; and (3) to instruct the students on evaluating Web sites, using online library services, and searching the library catalog and online databases.

## ***LITERATURE REVIEW***

At the time this article was written, the author did not find any published literature on libraries participating in planned virtual library services as part of a commercially available course authoring program. There is a lot of published literature on the psychology, pedagogy, design, and communication issues surrounding distance or virtual course offerings published in education and social behavior literature. For the purposes of this article, the author limited the review to a search on authoring software programs and distance education guidelines or initiatives by libraries.

Distance education is a concept that has been used for about one hundred years. As stated by Rockenbach and Almagno, "Delivering instructional materials over a distance began as early as the turn of the century with the U.S. postal system. This was followed by courses deliverable through radio around 1910, television (1960s), video (1980s) and CD-ROM (1990s)."<sup>1</sup> It would seem a fair conclusion that, as communication and delivery systems advance, so do the choices for how education can be accomplished. The Internet and Web seem to be the next educational option to be investigated and used.

Authoring software programs allow instructors to design courses on the Web that are accessible to students via the Internet. An instructor may use these programs to either enhance a course in which they are also meeting face-to-face with students in a classroom, or to design and deliver a course without ever meeting with students. Enhancing a course can be as simple as providing additional course information such as syllabi or notes that traditionally are distributed

in paper format during a class. In general, course authoring software programs are commercially available and require an on-site manager. The on-site manager then trains faculty on content and design and students on use of the program.

Centrinity describes its program as a “communications platform that enables users to break free of traditional communications barriers and work on their own terms—anytime, anywhere.”<sup>2</sup> This program is one example that might be used to enhance a course with online communication tools. Four examples of more robust course management programs are:

1. CentraOne (Institute for Distance & Distributed Learning) at <<http://www.iddl.vt.edu>>
2. WebCT at <<http://www.webct.com>>
3. Bb (Blackboard) at <<http://www.blackboard.com>>
4. Centra Software at <[http://www.centra.com/index\\_flash.asp](http://www.centra.com/index_flash.asp)>

The above programs are complex and offer encompassing course development, course delivery (communication and collaboration tools), assessment tools (interactive quizzes, tests, and evaluations), and course management options. Full information about these programs is available on their Web sites.

The most extensive guidelines on distance learning library services are published by the Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL). These guidelines state,

The library services offered to the distance learning community should be designed to meet effectively a wide range of informational, bibliographic, and user needs. The exact combination of central and site staffing for distance library services will differ from institution to institution.<sup>3</sup>

There are many examples in the literature on library services provided to support distant library users and distance education students. The library profession is on the threshold of establishing standard models or approaches to a new type of library support. There are terminology issues associated with various projects and initiatives. Does this new type of service fall under outreach, remote, distance, extension, evening, distributed, or off-campus library programs?<sup>4-8</sup> There are also examples of individual institutions developing in-house programs to support non-traditional library users.<sup>9-10</sup> One excellent source of information that tries to categorize library support of distance education issues and initiatives is available on the Web <<http://alexia.lis.uiuc.edu/~b-sloan/libdist.htm>>. According to the producer, “The purpose of this site is to provide an information resource for librarians interested in the many issues of library support for distance learners.”<sup>11</sup>

## ***THE S.A.G.E. PROJECT***

In a series of meetings with the administrative coordinator, who represented the course instructors, and the WebCT manager, decisions were made to identify which library services would be provided to support the S.A.G.E. program. The identified resources were: document delivery, electronic reserves, Ask a Health Sciences Librarian (reference), access to the PHSL Web site, information on evaluating Web sites, and a list of Web sites pertinent to the course.

Within WebCT, the library icon (see Figure 1) leads directly to the library resources and

services Web page created for S.A.G.E. (see Figure 2). The page consists of the following major selections: (1) a direct link to the PHSL Web site and its resources, (2) OSU S.A.G.E. Web-based resources (47 sites), (3) electronic reserves, (4) document delivery, and (5) Ask a Health Sciences Librarian. Three additional sub-links were identified as specific support for these classes: (1) Arizona State University Web site for Research in Gerontology, (2) a link to an online version of the American Psychological Association style guide required for student papers, and (3) net.Tutor, an online tutorial for using the Internet and Web site evaluation guidelines. Special mention should be made that the OSU S.A.G.E. Web based resources and the Arizona State University Web site for Research in Gerontology were evaluated and selected by the course instructors and librarian as excellent Internet sites for information and statistics concerning this course of study.

Course authoring programs are designed for instructors to create course content which students can access over the Internet. A student logs into a specific course using a login and password. The instructor may include any number of options, including syllabi, calendar of assignments, class notes, quizzes, identified Web resources, e-mail, chat, or discussion groups. WebCT allows the author of the course to choose all appropriate elements desired for a particular course.

A document delivery request page was created specifically for this series of courses. It is called ADD or Article Delivery to the Desktop (see Figure 3). Students were instructed to search the library catalog and identify whether the material was available at OSU or whether it would need to be obtained through interlibrary loan. In-house requests were filled by Circulation Services evening staff, and interlibrary loan requests were processed by Document Delivery staff. All filled requests were sent to the student via an e-mail message that contained the URL for the server address of the requested article. For the first course, the PHSL received sixteen requests for materials via this service. Fourteen requests were available in-house, and two requests required an interlibrary loan. Any problems encountered with accessing the requested material were resolved through e-mail messages between the student and the library staff.

## **FIGURE 1. Sample Course Page in WebCT**

S.A.G.E.

This course is designed to study individual, family, and ethnic/cultural issues related to aging. Case studies are used as a teaching tool for in-depth study of the interdisciplinary issues facing older adults.

Allied Medicine 791 D  
Summer Quarter 2001  
Margaret H. Teafora, Ph.D



**FIGURE 2. Library Resources Page Within WebCT**

#### Prior Health Sciences Library Services

Health Sciences Library Home Page: Link to OSCAR (Library catalog), Medline (research databases) and more

ASU West Library: Research in Gerontology: Link to Arizona State University Gerontology website

APA Style Guide: Online help for citing references

net.Tutor: Online tutorial for using the Internet

OSU S.A.G.E. Web-Based Resources: Link to class page of identified web-based resources

Electronic Reserves: Link to additional class readings

Document Delivery: Link to request journal articles

Ask a Health Sciences Librarian: Link to ask a question

Return to SAGE Home Page

Last Updated: February 28, 2001 by Prior Health Sciences Library

<http://bones.med.ohio-state.edu/gerontology/index.html>

Electronic reserves and Ask a Health Sciences Librarian are established services on the PHS� Web site. Both of these services were given top-level access on the WebCT library page. During the orientation session, the course faculty were given instruction on how to submit supplemental class readings for scanning into the system, and students were trained to access these readings. The responsibility for responding to the “Ask a Health Sciences Librarian” Internet reference service is shared by nine librarians, who were informed that there might be an increase in questions.

The PHS� scanned one article into the electronic reserves system for the first course. It was rather lengthy at forty pages, which proved problematic for student access. The length of time to download this article at their remote sites was six to eight hours, or not at all. It is not certain whether the cause was the library system server or the computer set-up of each of the

affected students. The downloading problem was successfully resolved by splitting the document into four ten-page segments. One request for assistance was received via the "Ask a Health Sciences Librarian" request form. It was a request for citation clarification. The librarian who responded successfully assisted this student.

### **FIGURE 3. Prior Health Sciences Library**

#### ***ADD: Article Delivery to the Desktop***

Electronic requests can be made 24 hours a day by clicking on the appropriate category below. Must have a PC with Netscape or Explorer 4.0 or higher and Acrobat Reader 3.0 or higher.

**Article is available at an OSU Library: 2-4 days**

**Article is Not available at an OSU Library: 2-4 weeks**

Last Updated: Wednesday, March 18, 2001 by Prior Health Sciences Library  
<http://bones.med.ohio-state.edu/staff/gerontology/>

### ***DISCUSSION***

The series of courses are still in progress so a final evaluation of library participation cannot be fully reported. The initial planning, orientation, and start-up for the project was very time intensive. The librarian was given approximately one hour to instruct the students in evaluating Web sites, searching the library catalog, searching citation databases, reviewing the PHSL Web page, and using online services. The author believes that this one-hour session greatly benefited the students in using library services and gathering information for their studies. Research comparing distance students who receive a face-to-face orientation with students given an e-mail orientation or no orientation at all might prove useful to future library participation in similar projects.

Document delivery has been the most used service. It has required a large time investment in Web page development, along with training of the Circulation Services staff. Document Delivery staff did not receive any special training. The decision to have evening Circulation Services staff process the in-house document delivery requests was made in consultation with the Head of Circulation Services. This has proved to be successful and an excellent way to maximize staff resources.

Special maintenance issues did occur for this project. Adding the individual patron record to the library system and establishing a special patron type was time consuming but necessary for the student to have access to all library resources and services. Ongoing maintenance of the library Web page within WebCT has not been a problem. Slight adjustments were needed to add or remove items with the change over to the second and third courses of the S.A.G.E. series. There will also be some maintenance required when the courses are completed to remove access to library services and to remove the patron record from the system.

## CONCLUSION

The overall scope of the project can be viewed at two levels for the library and librarian. The first view is the use of library services and personnel as information suppliers whether or not the user is in the building. A generic library Web services page could be added to WebCT and be used by any course instructor as a general library support page within any course. The second view is the librarian as teacher and instructor. The term "course related instruction" is used to define specific subject teaching as one form of library instruction at OSU. Using WebCT cemented these two views into one package and one place. Librarians should investigate course authoring software programs to analyze if they can be used to create online library courses whether it is for library schools or for college students to learn about their libraries.

To date, this model has proved to be successful. Results from a survey of all participants will supplement the cost analysis information that will be calculated at the end of the series. More research on how libraries and librarians can use course authoring software programs is recommended.

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## APPENDIX

S.A.G.E.  
Series in Applied Gerontology Education  
The Ohio State University Health Sciences Center

On-Campus Class Session Outline

9:00-9:30	Welcome, Introductions and Student Perspectives on S.A.G.E.	Director, Office of Geriatrics and Gerontology
9:30-10:15	Team Building Exercise	Ass't. Dean for Academic Services, OSU Medical Administration
10:15-10:30	About S.A.G.E.	Director, OGG
	Break	
10:45-11:30	Expectations for S.A.G.E.	Course Faculty
11:30-12:00	Adult Learners in the Online Environment	Instructional Development Specialist, College of Medicine and Public Health
	Lunch	
1:00-2:00	WebCT Training	Instructional Development Specialist
2:00-2:20	Searching the Internet/ Evaluating Sites	Librarian, OSU Health Sciences Library
2:20-2:45	The OSU Health Sciences Library Web Site	Librarian
	Break	
3:00-3:30	Using MedLine and other online resources	Librarian
3:30-4:30	Team Building Exercise/ Wrap Up	S.A.G.E. Team